

GUEST COMMENT

Farmers and terminators

by Ron Macher

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In 1988, Delta and Pine Land Company announced it had been granted a patent entitled, "Control of Plant Gene Expression." Delta and Pine said, the patent broadly covers plants seeds, both transgenic (genetically engineered) and conventional. The principle application of this technology will be to control unauthorized planting of seed . . . by using such practice non-economically unauthorized saved seed not germinate." Basically, a plant's genetic code is programmed so the second generation of seed is sterile — it is patented. This prevents farmers from saving seed for replanting on their land! The patent is owned jointly by Delta and Pine and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A licensing agreement with USDA awarded Delta and Pine the exclusive right to license this technology to others. Exclusive licenses on federal projects were not possible before the 1986 Federal Technology Transfer Act, which allows corporations to provide funding to USDA for research projects. In other words, corporations can use federal tax dollars as stepping stones for profits for themselves. Delta

and Pine invested about \$530,000 in the terminator research — and may reap billions from the patent.

It's not surprising that corporations want this technology, but it is appalling that the USDA would willingly participate in creating a technology that has the sole purpose of harming crops — and harming farmers. Why doesn't the USDA instead spend money on research to improve open-pollinated varieties to pass on to farmers?

Delta and Pine had successfully terminated tobacco and cotton seeds, and intended it to work with sorghum, soybeans, wheat, rice and other crops. Shortly thereafter, Monsanto bought Delta and Pine. Since then many companies have begun their own terminator research.

The Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) reports that 12 institutions have patents on more than 20 terminator variations and companies like Pioneer Hi-Bred and Dupont have technologies that could easily be turned into terminators. In a few years it may be hard to find quality germinating seed that is not owned by a major company.

The technology threatens not just farmers, but food security for the entire world as continuing buyouts and mergers bring the total number of industry players

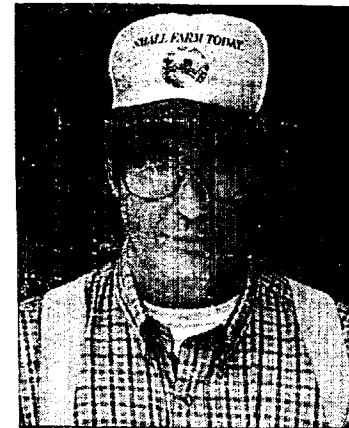
to a handful who will have control of the entire food system. RAFI notes that Delta and Pine is a major soybean breeder and owns 73 percent of the U.S. cottonseed market, and that 10 seed corporations control 40 percent of the commercial seed market. If corporations can stop seed from germinating, they will control far more of the market.

Currently 20 to 30 percent of soybean fields in the Midwest, and up to 50 percent in the South, are planted with farmer-saved seeds. Most wheat farmers rely on saved seeds, returning to the commercial market every four or five years, according to RAFI.

There is potential of harm even to farmers that choose not to buy terminator varieties. If you raise open-pollinated crops and your neighbor plants terminators, what are the chances of his crop pollinating yours? Worse, you will not know until next year, when you go to plant your saved seeds and nothing comes up.

Share your concerns with your local and national legislators and with newspapers, radio stations and fellow farmers. And write USDA to make clear your opinion.

Macher is a Missouri farmer and editor and publisher of Small Farm Today magazine.



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0139 This must be stopped now. Stop the Terminator seeds. We want organic food. over

JUNE 1999

This Terminator seed²⁰ killed the monarch butterfly caterpillar so it will kill birds frogs + lizards that eat insects. When will it kill our children?

Could all these pesticides, chemicals + hormones in our food be the reason so many people are getting cancer. Even babies + small children are getting cancer. I want to see less pesticides chemicals + hormones in our food. I want organic raised food. By stopping all these pesticides + chemicals put on crops ~~it~~ would not be in our creeks + rivers our drinking water.

Foreign countries refuse that Terminator seed they are buying less grains from the U.S. because of chemicals. They are smart. I also would like to see chickens, cattle + pork raised in normal healthy condition not confined.

Sincerely

Joy @nuise

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Stop the terminator seed. We want organic food.